

**RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES
FACE-TO-FACE MEETING AGREEMENT**

**WESTERLY HIGH SCHOOL
MARCH 19, 2002**

ATTENDING FROM WESTERLY: Margaret Steward, Grandparent; Scott Kizner, Superintendent of Schools; Sylvia Blanda, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Ann McCrave, Math Department Head; Amanda Doescher, School Committee; Jim Murano, Principal, Westerly High School; Christine Sieczkiewicz, Westerly Teachers Association.

RIDE STAFF: Dr. Todd Flaherty, Deputy Commissioner; Elizabeth Hyman, Assessment; Elliot Krieger, Commissioner's Office; Kim Carson, Office of Special Needs; Karen Lepore, Regents' Fellow; Lucille Andolfo, Regents Fellow; George McDonough, Office of Integrated Social Services; Robert Mason, Office of Research, High School Reform & Adult Education.

RIDE WELCOME AND MEETING ORIENTATION

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Todd Flaherty welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting including:

- Establishing of agreements on "next steps" as outlined in the School Performance Category Technical Assistance Bulletin with regard to required District/school/RIDE actions;
- Addressing district capacity for implementing activities/next steps (to be outlined in the May 1st CRP, Article 31- Strategic Planning document for submittal to RIDE which also needs to be approved publicly in a Westerly School Advisory Board meeting);
- Addressing RIDE capacity to support, if applicable; and
- Generating a meeting report which needs to be made "public" at the District's school advisory board meeting.

DISTRICT/SCHOOL RESPONSE

Representatives from Westerly were given the opportunity to respond to the Performance category for Westerly High School. Scott Kizner, the

Superintendent, began the review by stating his remarks would begin with 1999 and move forward to 2002. He indicated that Westerly embraced the "effective schools model", that the goal was to "leave no child behind" and that the district was supportive of teaching to high standards. However, "changes will not happen overnight" - the High School faculty is currently responding to challenges that have been present for years". He described the work of the high school faculty in addressing this issue by looking at the element of "time" - six and one-half hour day - and how the time available could be used in a "most efficient and effective way" to organize for instruction.

At this point considerable time was spent in discussing the issue of "non-test takers" and the impact that these "absent records" might have on the overall results for Westerly. "Kids that were not present for testing affected us." As part of this discussion the issue of "special needs students (including out of district placements) and the extent to which or not their inclusion in testing might influence the results for Westerly High School was identified. Considerable time was also spent discussing the issue of "quality/adequacy" of educational services provided to students with special needs who are "out placed". (lots of discussion on this issue). Mention was made that 20% of students were receiving "special services." It was pointed out that RIDE could be helpful to Westerly by "helping us identify successful practices (schools) helping students with special needs".

Dr. Flaherty moved the discussion to professional development initiatives by asking - "do you feel the professional development initiatives reach all teachers?" The superintendent and others indicated that all faculty "knew about the opportunities" and that most were involved. The presence of incentives to participate was mentioned - such as "courses paid for". However, professional development was not always "tied to the strategic plan" and this was an "area to improve upon." "We have to get away from tracking [and] continue to promote teaching to standards and promote high expectations for all students."

PROGRAMMATIC/INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIONS

The High School Principal, James Murano, described actions being considered or implemented to improve "performance on the tests". He linked his remarks to three areas: (1) curriculum, (2) student motivation to perform on tests, and (3) professional development.

Regarding motivation to perform: (1) the high school has sent letters home to stress the importance of tests; (2) assemblies have been held informing students of the importance of tests; (3) students have been restricted from participating in "extra-curricular" activities until they finish the test; (4) not allowing any "field trips" to be scheduled during testing; and (5) having the Truant Officer follow-up on attendance for students in test-taking grades (designed to increase the

number of students who participate in testing). Regarding more "long term" motivation plans: (1) include scores on high school transcripts and to accomplish make-up testing if required; and (2) create a new elective course for 9th/10th grade students that can help students prepare for the tests; aligned to "skills and knowledge needed to pass or do well on the tests."

Regarding curriculum: there was extensive discussion on "block scheduling" and the positive effects high school faculty felt about using this approach and the effect had on student performance; for example: it has allowed students to "take more advanced courses". Dr. Flaherty asked: "What kinds of kids have benefited from block scheduling?" Response: all kids because (1) there has been an increase in the number of students on the honor role; (2) number of students in advanced courses has increased; and (3) number of students who were previously earning low grades (C's & D's) were now earning high grades. It is the "sense of the District" that block scheduling will "result in improved performance on the standardized tests" and this will help Westerly High School move out of the low performing category. Mention was made that curriculum continued to be under review and that on-going work was being done to continue aligning curriculum to standards. The Superintendent cited the on-going work, including better discussions, with faculty at the middle school regarding articulation with academic content at the high school and that "this effort will help improve performance". The implication: of high school students on future testing).

The High School Principal described a unique initiative to create "literacy coaches," or master teachers serving as such, in the areas of writing, reading and math. This is to be an area of emphasis for staff development and the expectation is that this effort will also result in improved student performance on future testing. Implication: this initiative will be a high priority for the high school.

The High School Principal indicated they would be disaggregating assessment information in order to adjust curriculum offerings to support weak students; however, "We do not want testing to be a barrier to the instructional program."

Regarding professional development: comments in this area related to the issue of expanding the literacy coaches, block scheduling, and teaching to standards. Once again the point was made that "lots" of faculty get involved but the training should be connected to the district's strategic plan and how it will affect student learning.

RIDE/WESTERLY AGREEMENTS

The changes and improvements spoken about will be incorporated in changes to the District strategic plan and school improvement plan. It is vital that the attendees from Westerly "capture [the] images of what changes are being proposed in revised plans by May". There was agreement to do that for the May 1st submission. These changes include:

- Westerly (district) will complete all work on the K-12 English Language Arts curriculum and Math curriculum by Summer of 2002;
- Westerly (district) will ensure that all teachers will receive training in standards-based instructional techniques through a well-articulated professional development program;
- Westerly High School will continue its building level initiatives which address the "All Kids" in it's revised school plan;
- Westerly High School will continue to look at instructional strategies in support of special needs students;
- Westerly High School will employ an extensive data analysis effort to monitor student progress at all levels of student achievement;
- Westerly High School will include in its school improvement plan actions addressing the questions in the attached data analysis sheet provided to the team at RIDE;
- Westerly High School will clarify what the graduation expectations are for all students through a "core curriculum".

POTENTIAL RIDE SUPPORT FOR WESTERLY

- Need more resources for staff development and we "need money for the Literacy Coaches";
- RIDE could help obtain funds for participating in the University of Pittsburgh "Principles of Learning" course. Westerly would like to get the training - feels it would help re-enforce the teaching to standards issue. (Dr. Flaherty - "we will see what can be done to keep up supporting the training");
- RIDE will continue to look for funds to support "networking" with SORICO and other schools. Further, RIDE will help the high school faculty "think through" how to schedule a sequence of courses so that students are in classes relating to the new standards tests when those skills that are being "tested" are being "taught". Westerly is not opposed to networking - but participants felt that networking has its limits - sometimes there is a delay in getting things done);
- RIDE will clarify how dropout rate is determined with the assistance of the MIS staff.

Other areas that didn't seem to fall into one of the categories above: issue of development of vocational courses as part of Westerly High School's program of course offerings and the subsequent relationship with the Chariho Career & Technical Center.